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RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001170

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: MILITARY MACHINATIONS ALLEGED, CRITICIZED

REF: A. ANKARA 1167

1B. ANKARA 0680

1C. ANKARA 0430

Classified By: A/DCM Kim DeBlauw for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

11. (C) Chastened by the unintended consequences of its April 2007 "e-memorandum," Turkey's military has refrained from publicly commenting on politics for well over a year. However, a series of media reports suggest the brass has been busy behind the scenes seeking to influence key institutions and public opinion. These revelations have subjected the TGS -- and prospective Chief of Defense Gen Ilker Basbug -- to unprecedented criticism, including from erstwhile allies. Staunch secularists, meanwhile, are praising the military machinations as essential to protecting the state from Islamist subversion at the hands of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Most Turks expect the military to continue to exercise its influence behind the scenes through sympathetic NGOs, academics and journalists. More direct military intervention is unlikely as long as AKP legislative initiatives, and the party itself, remain boxed in by the judiciary. End Summary

Clandestine TGS - Judiciary Meeting

12. (C) For all its efforts to stay out of the political limelight since AKP's stunning victory in July 2007 elections, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) has been implicated in a series of political scandals suggesting considerable behind-the-scenes machinations. The acknowledgment by both Constitutional Court deputy chief justice Osman Paksut and Land Forces Commander (and prospective Defense Chief) Ilker Basbug that they met out of public view in early March, just ten days before the initiation of the closure case against the AKP (ref a), is only the most recent revelation of covert and potentially conspiratorial relations between the military and other state institutions.

Allegations of Coup Plotting

13. (SBU) The Basbug-Paksut brouhaha follows a series of disclosures of clandestine military plotting over the past four years, including the April 2007 publication in the weekly magazine Nokta of the purported diaries of former Naval Chief Ozden Ornek. The "Ornek diaries" describe anti-government coup plotting at the highest levels of the

General Staff in 2004, when Gen Hilmi Ozkok was CHOD. Ornek and Ozkok denied the legitimacy of the diaries and Nokta was shut down by its owner soon after, presumably under pressure from quarters angry at the magazine's revelations. Still, many commentators believe Nokta's reporting reflected a coup in the making.

¶4. (SBU) The independent liberal daily Taraf has recently published an alleged TGS secret memorandum dated March 2006, which listed sympathetic journalists, academics and NGOs (including retired military personnel) and offered guidance on how to use them to influence public opinion against the governing party and in favor of the armed forces. The memo also listed NGOs the TGS believes are financed by the U.S. and EU, including through the Soros Foundation and Jewish organizations, and which are exploited by Western powers to change the secular regime and divide Turkey. The memo alleges as well that German-funded institutions had as their goal the provocation of ethnic and religious disputes in Turkey. Many commentators assert that the Basbug-Paksut meeting and alleged TGS attempts to influence public opinion against the government are proof that such a TGS document not only exists but is being implemented.

¶5. (SBU) Former military officers are also implicated in the so-called "Ergenekon" conspiracy (ref b), uncovered earlier this year. The government's investigation has yet to run its course, with indictments expected soon. Press reporting portrays the Ergenekon conspiracy as a well-organized and highly secretive effort to recruit and control academics and NGOs, as well as other legal and illegal groups, to be used

ANKARA 00001170 002 OF 003

in anti-government activities. Papers have also asserted that evidence gathered so far during the Turkish National Police's Ergenekon investigation confirm the coup-plotting described in Ornek's diaries.

¶6. (SBU) In April 2008, Taraf and other papers reported on former Naval Forces Commander Yener Karahanoglu's intervention with the Constitutional Court in April 2007, as the Court was preparing to rule on the quorum requirement for the presidential election. The court subsequently ruled against the AKP, making it impossible at that juncture to elect Abdullah Gul as president and paving the way for early elections. Similar allegations of inappropriate interference followed the initiation of the closure case against the AKP in March 2008, with media outlets alleging that the TGS had covertly provided the Constitutional Court with "evidence" that could be used to charge AKP with anti-secular activities.

Unconvincing TGS Rebuttals...and Threats

¶7. (C) The TGS has done itself no favors with its belated and vaguely worded rebuttals of such allegations. The military was forced to acknowledge the Basbug-Paksut meeting, but characterized it unconvincingly as a friendly call to discuss the February cross-border ground operation against PKK terrorists in northern Iraq. In the case of the alleged March 2006 memo on influencing civil society, the TGS merely said headquarters had never approved any such document, leaving open to speculation whether such a document was nevertheless prepared and circulated. The TGS has drawn criticism for threatening to prosecute journalists reporting such activities.

Tensions Between Military and Secular Opposition

¶8. (SBU) In the midst of these revelations, the military has found it cannot necessarily rely on old allies -- the Kemalist Republic People's Party (CHP) and ultra-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Both parties criticized the brass for appearing to accede to U.S. demands to end the late

February 2008 ground operation against PKK terrorists in northern Iraq following the visit of Defense Secretary Gates to Ankara (ref c). The TGS issued a sharply-worded rebuke, suggesting the opposition's criticism was tantamount to treason. The AKP closure case subsequently refocused the military and opposition on their common interest in hobbling the Erdogan government, but considerable bitterness remains. MHP chairman Bahceli told his parliamentary group on June 10 that "the only place we should look for solutions to the problems of Turkey is the Turkish Grand National Assembly." Bahceli was also openly critical of the military intransigence embodied in CHOD Buyukanit's comment that the closure case against the AKP was a "declaration of an already known fact." Meanwhile, civil society groups have taken to the streets to protest the military's political maneuvers: several thousand activists demonstrated peacefully June 21 in Istanbul against military involvement in politics (septel).

¶9. (SBU) Voices in favor of the military's political prerogatives remain strong if shrill, with Kemalist daily Cumhuriyet and ultra-rightist Yeni Cag excoriating any who dare criticize the military's right to take any measures to protect the secular state founded by Ataturk.

Comment

¶10. (C) Repeated allegations of military plotting and influence peddling with other government institutions, and the General Staff's awkward rebuttals and threats of judicial retaliation, are meeting with increased criticism from mainstream opinion-makers and ordinary Turks of all political persuasions who believe 21st century Turkey has outgrown the need for military paternalism. No longer represented as before in key governmental or judicial bodies due to legislative reforms, frustrated by the fecklessness of the political opposition, and offended (in one commentator's words) by public skepticism of its tutelage, the military will likely intensify its efforts to convey its views through sympathetic media, academic personalities, and NGOs -- some with dubious civic credentials. (A prominent Ankara academic

ANKARA 00001170 003 OF 003

and embassy contact reports he and selected colleagues are periodically summoned to TGS headquarters to be lectured on TGS views on political issues.)

¶11. (C) More direct military intervention in politics remains unlikely as long as the judiciary continues to stymie the government's legislative initiatives and the AKP remains under threat of closure. General Basbug, now under a cloud himself, will inherit a military organization that retains wide popular respect, but whose political role is subject to increasing public skepticism.

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